



Pingry

Remarks from Head of School Tim Lear 50-Year Club Lunch | Reunion Weekend — May 3, 2024

In thinking about my remarks for today, I kept coming back to those famous words of Sir Isaac Newton, who said: “If I have seen further than others, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”

As Pingry alumni, we stand on the shoulders of those giant teachers, coaches, mentors, and friends who shaped our student experience — and in so doing, also shaped our lives **after** graduation.

One of those Pingry giants is thankfully here with us today: Coach Miller Bugliari from the Class of 1952. Miller is marking his 72nd Reunion this weekend. Come next Tuesday, he’ll also be celebrating his 89th birthday.

And this coming fall — Miller’s 65th season as head coach of our varsity boys soccer team — Pingry needs to win just 16 more games for him to reach another personal milestone: 950 career wins.

Miller has been both a wise counselor and a wonderful friend to me for decades — and since becoming Head of School, I have appreciated his timely reminders that no one person is ever expected to have all of the answers all of the time.

Miller’s advice often makes me think of my favorite fictional detective — Chief Inspector Armand Gamache from the mystery novels written by Louise Penny. And if you haven’t read the books, perhaps you’ve watched the *Three Pines* series on Amazon Prime?

Inspector Gamache also recognizes the power of humility and curiosity, and he believes there are four statements that lead to wisdom — I’m sorry; I was wrong; I don’t know; and I need help.

Remembering the importance of listening, being open-minded, and asking questions are valuable lessons for students and adults alike. How fortunate we are to have people like Miller — and so many other longtime members of our Pingry community — who can somehow manage to keep us grounded and aiming high at the same time.

In preparation for today’s lunch, I wondered how well the Pingry Class of 1974 embodied these lessons. So I asked Miller, who said, “No comment...”

Then I sought a copy of your senior yearbook. What struck me immediately about your *Blue Book* was the dedication page, the first part of which reads as follows:

“This is the last Blue Book to be published by an entirely male Pingry School. We therefore find it appropriate to dedicate the 1974 Blue Book to the countless students and alumni who, through their many hours spent in Pingry, have been a part of the school’s history, and who, in fact, shaped the character of the school, earning for it the distinguished and respected reputation it deserves.”

Those words have stood the test of time because they demonstrate not one, but two of Pingry’s enduring values — the importance of community and the importance of working for the common good rather than solely for personal advantage.

Your class could have dedicated the yearbook to yourselves as the final graduating class of an all-boys Pingry. But no — you realized you were part of a much larger Pingry community. And you chose instead to honor those who came before you ... the giants on whose shoulders you were then standing.

The second part of your *Blue Book* dedication is equally important, and it reads as follows:

“In addition, we feel that one man deserves special recognition for his continuous efforts to retain the fellowship which lives within the Pingry student body. This man’s relationship with the Pingry students has, during the past 15 years, been that of a teacher, a guidance counselor, a disciplinarian, and a leader. But, beyond all this, he has always been our friend. The 1974 Pingry Blue Book is also dedicated to Mr. John R. Dufford Jr.”

Those words have also stood the test of time because they demonstrate yet another one of Pingry’s enduring values — the importance of the relationships we forge with one another.

As we can see just by looking around this room, our relationships and our shared sense of connection are strengthened when we commit to showing up for the people and the places that matter to us.

Renowned Harvard economist and current Pingry Trustee Dr. Greg Mankiw from the Class of 1976 reminded us of the importance of relationships during his recent visit to campus.

When asked his thoughts on what skill was most important for Pingry students to have as they prepare for life beyond this campus, Dr. Mankiw answered without hesitation: “The ability to communicate. They need to know how to read, write, and communicate with their peers. They need to know how to navigate relationships effectively.”

As Board Chair Ian Shrank just mentioned, our next Strategic Plan is going to place a renewed focus on the people and the relationships that help to define our school. Pingry has always been a profoundly human place, so it’s essential for us to figure out how we can continue to evolve, and grow, and remake ourselves without losing a sense of who we are.

In these strategic planning conversations, we're focused on making space for what's positive — and making space for what's great.

And sometimes what's great is **not** what's new — sometimes greatness is simply what's enduring: like the importance of strengthening community and building relationships; cultivating passions and purpose to deepen learning; recentering the Honor Code; and promoting well-being and belonging.

Independent schools often like to follow academic trends and exhibit a fondness for BIG ideas. But I would argue that to be truly innovative, Pingry might instead consider returning to its basics: people, relationships, community, excellence, honor, and integrity.

We want to develop integrity and character in parallel with exceptional academics. We want to graduate students of character who pursue lives of purpose. And we want Pingry students to be grounded by the honor of working with and *for others*.

An unexpected result of our efforts to put a renewed focus on these enduring Pingry values has been a significant increase in the number of students pursuing military service — either by applying to one of the nation's service academies – or – through ROTC programs at the colleges and universities of their choice.

Thanks to the combined efforts of Joe Kinney in our College Counseling Office and Dr. Barrett Ward from our English Department, we now have five Pingry graduates currently enrolled in ROTC programs at the following schools: Harvard (two — including last year's valedictorian), Cornell, Texas A&M, and Wake Forest. With another heading to Providence this fall.

And for the service academies: three Pingry alumni have graduated from either West Point or Annapolis in the past 12 years — yet we already have at least nine current Upper School students who have already expressed an interest in one of the academies.

Considering the high standards to which we hold our students — and the even higher standards to which we hold our faculty and staff members — it's incredibly gratifying to see how Pingry students and alumni are embracing (and living!) our school's core values.

I'll close my remarks by returning to the Class of 1974 *Blue Book* and quoting from a page titled "My hope for my son and the Class of 1974."

"Achievement without struggle proves little to others and nothing to ourselves. It *does not* forge the individual into a better person. However, if you struggle — if you use all of your ability — and remember and appreciate the help you have received from others along the way; if you "get up" after defeat and try as hard as before — then you will have won!"

Fifty years later, this message still rings true. And it remains among the key life lessons we are teaching Pingry students. My thanks to all of you for being the giants upon whose shoulders today's Pingry students are now standing.

Enjoy your Reunion Weekend..